

SB 1088  
Testimony of Charlyne Olko

Members of the Public Health Committee

I am in favor of SB 1088. My decision is not financially based but dignity based.

I am the parent of a young adult with an intellectual disability. My son is my youngest child and I am not a young parent. I have been a parent for 40 yrs and I thought, experienced. Parenting my youngest son was a new learning curve in parenting. The idea that individuals with intellectual disabilities needed to have decisions made for them is archaic. Living in an institution is barbaric. We know so much more now than we did back then. My hardest decision in my son's life was letting him go to grow. As Bob Perske coined, "THE RISK of DIGNITY." He wanted to go to college and was accepted to George Mason University, 400 miles away. It was the most difficult decision to let him go. I was frightened for him; flying alone, walking in an unfamiliar area, not knowing anyone. My list is exhausting. It was the best decision that I had had ever made in my life and his. He returned from school a confident, independent young man with experiences that this state or I would have never allowed him to have.

I understand the fear that the Southbury parents may have and that of their adult children. You do not know what your missing if you have never have had the opportunity to experience the difference. The DDS site details that private placement companies show residents pictures of their options. The residents need to be given the opportunity to see the realities of their choices and not with pictures. They should be allowed to spend a day and the transitions need to be thoughtfully planned out with resident participation in months and not years. Many of the residents are no longer young and have the right to spend the remainder of their lives with respect and dignity in the community. I am not convinced that the segregation at Southbury is a safe environment. As taxpayers, we fund a full medical staff but yet a death occurred at that institution because of a neglected dental issue. It would have never occurred in a community setting. Yes, Southbury must be closed but done correctly and not over years and years. There has been conversation to close Southbury for many years. It's now time for action! Let's do it because we value all people. We must not let our fear of the unknown or financial issues determine individual rights as members of our community. We all matter!